

Armistice

by HO v. Rosenberg, then regimental adjutant of the Elisabeth
Regiment

After the hot fighting in the Argonne¹⁾, Deployed by Morainville on October 21, 1918. After the previous hot fighting of earlier years, there is now calm in the Woëvre plain, while further to the right in the area of Dun bitter fighting is raging around the Meuse line, which the Americans are trying to roll up here from south to north in the course of their campaign, which began on September 28, 1918 large-scale attack which the regiment had withstood to the point of being completely sacrificed in the Argonne. There was no doubt that only the success or failure of this major offensive, which had now been going on for four weeks, would decide when the attack would also begin on the eastern front from Verdun.

The Côte Lorraine lay like a wide rampart, crowned by the ruins of the shot-up forest, which had cost so much blood, in front of the regiment, which, according to the latest regulations for mobile defense, was set up with advance companies in the Cognon forest in swamp and quarry would have. There was no sign of the enemy. For hours our patrols trod the foreland right up to the foot of the Côte. Enemy patrols made an appearance here and there, but because they always gave way, there was never a collision.

Almost three weeks passed in this way, which were used to zealously expand the position. The news leaking out from home became more and more critical, and it became clearer and clearer that people behind the front were beginning to lose their nerve. One heard about the formation of soldiers' councils, about disobedience on the part of the neighboring troops. Men from a Bavarian 15cm battery stationed next to the regimental command post at Etain simply abandoned their firing positions to join the soldiers' council at Metz. Newspaper reports and the incoming orders revealed the imminent dissolution more and more clearly, but also showed clearly and unequivocally that this dissolution did not come from the front of the troops, but from home and the base. Eventually, events rushed in, without the troops at the front being able to follow what was happening so quickly and understand what a shameful game was being played. The Kaiser's abdication was announced almost simultaneously with a request from the High

Command to the troops to hold their positions until the negotiations on an armistice had been concluded.

Destiny continued unabated. We lay in the front line and did our duty, as we did throughout the difficult years of the war, and even if it was no longer the troops of 1914, the proud spirit of the Guards was still fully alive in the regiment, so that even those who were already Bolshevik-minded Replacement from the East, who was used to fill up the regiment after the losses in the Argonne, recovered his morale and the regiment could be described as quite strong.

And once more the regiment was put to the test and passed it with full honours, fighting in victorious defense until the last minute, rolling up its proud flags undefeated to face home and dissolution.

From October 21 to November 8, 1918 it had remained quiet in position. The enemy artillery was not particularly active, and there was no sign of enemy infantry at all. Suddenly, without the enemy artillery fire having **increased** significantly, in the morning hours of November 9th, at the same time as the people at home were celebrating a victory that would be their undoing, according to Scheidemann, all along the line received, at the regimental command post, the report that strong American rifle lines, mixed with French storm troopers, surprisingly in the morning fog in front of the front of the advance company, the 8th company under Lt. Wiese, had surfaced and, despite their totally unexpected appearance, were immediately fired upon. One had the impression that the enemy was extremely surprised at this unexpected resistance. He must have believed that the German troops were completely demoralized and in the process of disintegrating.

The rapid succession of reports provided the picture that was expected in the event of an attack. The enemy had made ready at night on the heights of the Côte Lorraine and had descended to the Woëvre plain in wide waves in order to simply overrun the German lines. About ten divisions strong, he attacked the thin front of three German divisions between Dieppe and Combres. The situation was undoubtedly precarious. It all came down to preventing a breakthrough despite the surprise. Reserves were no longer available to the "Plane Group"; if the breakthrough succeeded before the armistice was signed, the way to Metz was free. But then dangers arose, the scope of which could not be overlooked. And so Germans from all districts, guards, Bavaria, Saxony and Thuringia fought side by side here once again, while in the meantime the homeland and the stage rewarded this sacrifice with

betrayal and mutiny. By skilfully defending the advance, the enemy was held up all day from the regiment's main line of resistance as well as in the neighboring sectors, although their artillery fire was also increasing in intensity. But our artillery does not remain silent either and fights the advancing enemy waves with lively fire.

Enemy fire continued during the night, and at dawn on November 10 new, violent attacks by multiple superior forces began. The 8th Company was forced to evacuate the apron and fight back from the Cognon Forest to the main line of resistance. Well-placed barrage and the fire of our machine guns, which are still completely intact, prevent any penetration into the main line of resistance, although the enemy apparently still wants to achieve success here at any price by mass deployment of fresh troops. Our people observed with amazement the good equipment of the attackers and their strong nerves as they ruthlessly worked their way through the water and swamp despite the November cold. But their dash is in vain. During the course of November 10th they failed to break through into the main line of resistance at any point, but their losses increased more and more, while the regiment's losses remained low.

Nevertheless, the management is looking forward to the coming day with worries. Will it be possible to hold the position until the ceasefire that has become unavoidable is called off? Then the regiment will have fulfilled its duty and need not be ashamed of having to lay down its arms **[571]**.—Dawn breaks again, and again the Americans renewed their violent attacks. In the melee he is thrown back here and there, almost everywhere he is already in the wire entanglement. Around 9:00 a.m. the neighboring regiment announces a radio message from General Foch to the regimental command post, according to which there will be a ceasefire at 12 noon. An inquiry to the brigade command post reveals that nothing is known about this at the moment, on the contrary, the regiment is ordered to hold its position at all costs. In the meantime the enemy artillery fire diminished more and more and finally stopped altogether. Our artillery, on the other hand, continues to fire what the barrels only give. When asked, the battalion headquarters reported that the position was still firmly in our hands everywhere, but that the enemy was attacking again and again.

It's 10:30 a.m. the regiment issued the brigade order that at 11:55 all hostile action was to cease. Adjutants and messengers walk along the firing lines and announce the order.

Now the enemy should not be granted any more success in the last hour either, that is the firm will of each individual and so the fire is intensified until — 11.55 a.m. the fire is stopped with one blow. The surprised Americans think the Germans are surrendering and want to enter the trenches, but they are told that the war is over. The American battalion commander in charge here does not want to believe it at first, since he has not received any orders for days, but the sudden silence after the firefight that has just been raging across the front finally convinces him. While on our left at the 3rd Guard Regt. e.g. When the Americans take a large part of the trench crew into captivity, some of whom they later release again, a new neutral zone is agreed in front of the Elisabeth Regiment's front. Right in front of our barricade the Americans are assembling their rifles, sentries are posted on both sides and the wounded are tended to.

Another small episode played out. The negotiations with the Americans was conducted correctly and complied with by both parties. In the afternoon a French general suddenly appeared by the 8th Company, which was now again setting outposts, and demanded that the posts be withdrawn. The company commander, Lt. Wiese, refused and explained to the general, with the American commander agreeing with a smile, that if he did not leave the German zone immediately, he would have them fired, whereupon the French general preferred to disappear.

The regiment was relieved in the evening. Only posts remained at the front. The companies marched silently to the camp in the forest of Rouvres. The knowledge that everything we and the German people have suffered and fought for during four years was in vain lies on us all like a burden that can hardly be borne. The fireworks behind us at the front, which were no longer necessary and were therefore blown up by the thousands, seemed like a mockery to us. They shone on our path of shame and disgrace. Because our people lost themselves, they lost the war, although there were still enough fighters at the front who were determined to the last, as the Elisabeth Regiment had faithfully proved their tradition just a few hours ago.

- - - - -

The Book of Honor of the Guard (Part 2), pp. 569-571.